THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART
IDENTIFIES WORK ATTRIBUTED
TO GRUNEWALD AS FORGERY

Sherman E. Lee, Director of The Cleveland Museum of Art has announced that a painting in the Museum's collection that had become suspected by the Museum's staff of being a forgery has been proven to be such through research conducted by the Museum's chief conservator Ross Merrill with the assistance of other scientific laboratories. The painting, depicting St. Catherine of Alexandria, had been previously identified as the work of the 16th century German master Matthias Grünewald.

Thought to have been a panel from the presumed lost Altar of the Virgin, Queen of Heaven, a multi-panel altarpiece executed circa 1517-1520 for the Cathedral at Mainz, the painting was purchased by the Museum in 1974 for an unspecified amount.

The full purchase price is being refunded to the Museum according to Dr. Lee, the major part in cash with the remainder in the form of an Italian altarpiece of the late 14th century by Spinello Aretino. The seller of the fake Grünewald was not identified but Dr. Lee said, "He has acted in an honorable and courageous way in handling this matter and was as much taken in by the forgery as we were. He is a reputable art dealer with whom the Museum has worked in the past and will continue to work in the future."

Growing doubts about the painting's authenticity culminated after Mr. Merrill joined the Museum's staff. He then subjected the painting to forms of testing that had not been available previously. Through an isotope ratio analysis and

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an emission spectral analysis he was able to date the painting as a 20th century forgery.

Grünewald (1470/80-1528) was a contemporary of Albrecht Dürer, and along with Dürer is considered to be one of the two great masters of the German Renaissance. Documentary material about his life and work is meager and his fame rests primarily on a small number of magnificent paintings. Little more than 20 works by the artist survive, nine of which are part of the Isenheim Altar in Colmar, France. Most of the others are preserved in German and Swiss public collections, including those in Munich, Basel, Frankfurt, and Karlsruhe. Only one painting by this master is in the United States, the Small Crucifixion at the National Gallery in Washington.

The Mainz altarpiece has been presumed to have been lost at sea during the Thirty Years War. Joachim von Sandrart, Grünewald's biographer, writing in the late 17th century, reported that after the archbishopric of Mainz fell to the Protestant forces of King Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden in 1631 the Mainz altarpanels were looted and sent to Sweden on a ship which sank.

The altarpiece was described by Sandrart in his Teutsche Academie der Edlen Bau-, Bild- und Mahlerey-Künste (1675). In addition several Grünewald drawings in the collection of the Print Room, Berlin-Dahlem usually are associated with the Mainz altar. One of St. Catherine shows the basic composition of the figure as it appears on the forged panel.

"We made a serious mistake in the purchase of this painting," Dr. Lee said. "It lacked a known history but appeared to be genuine on first inspection. There is always risk such as this when a "lost work" by a great master reappears. It is important that museums continue to examine their collections, subjecting them to the type of modern scientific analysis used by Mr. Merrill in identifying this

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work as a forgery."

The painting will remain in the custody of the Museum for study and investigation purposes.

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